



Arizona Autism Charter Schools

POLICY TITLE: Local Wellness Policy

Policy Number: JHAA

Effective Date: 7/1/26

Revised Date: 02/02/2026 (Version 6.0)

Policy Owner: School Administration

PURPOSE

Rationale

Arizona Autism Charter Schools, Inc. (AZACS) is committed to the optimal development of every student. Research shows that good nutrition and physical activity during the school day are strongly correlated with positive student outcomes, including improved grades, attendance, standardized test performance, cognitive performance, and behavior.

AZACS recognizes that many children with autism face additional challenges that can make a nutritious diet and consistent physical activity especially difficult. Food sensitivities, gastrointestinal issues, and restricted or repetitive behaviors may affect student participation in meals and wellness activities. AZACS will work collaboratively with families and involve the school nurse and other professionals as needed to support special diets and wellness needs.

AZACS is also committed to supporting students with autism in physical activity and sports programs. The school provides trained staff and strategies to teach sports and fitness skills in an adapted fashion and maintains partnerships that expand opportunities for participation and community connection.

This policy outlines AZACS's approach to ensuring that environments and opportunities are available for all students to practice healthy eating and physical activity behaviors throughout the school day and is intended to comply with federal law, USDA regulations, ADE administrative review requirements, and applicable Arizona law, including A.R.S 15-242.01 (See attachment #2)

SCOPE

Applicability

This policy applies to all Arizona Autism Charter Schools campuses and covers all students, staff, contractors, visitors, and school-sponsored activities during the school day, as defined by federal regulations.

DEFINITIONS

Local Wellness Policy (LWP)

A written policy that establishes goals and procedures for nutrition education, physical activity, nutrition standards, and wellness promotion in schools.

Smart Snacks in School Standards

USDA nutrition standards that regulate the **sale** and provision of foods and beverages outside of reimbursable school meals during the school day. See attachment #1.

Arizona Healthy Schools Act- ARS 15-242.01

ARS 15-242.01 (formerly HB2164) prohibits public schools participating in federally funded or assisted meal programs from **serving, selling, or allowing a third party to sell** ultra-processed food on the school campus during the regular school day. See attachment # 2

School Day

Midnight before to 30 minutes after the end of the instructional day.

Wellness Committee

A representative group of stakeholders responsible for oversight, implementation review, and periodic updates of the Local Wellness Policy.

POLICY STATEMENT

Core Policy

Arizona Autism Charter Schools shall maintain a school environment that supports student wellness by:

- Providing access to nutritious meals that meet or exceed USDA requirements at campuses that operate the NSLP and SBP.
- Promoting developmentally appropriate and inclusive physical activity
- Delivering nutrition education that is accessible to students with diverse learning and sensory needs
- Ensuring all foods and beverages sold on the school campus during the school day meet Smart Snacks standards. Foods sold during fundraisers must meet Smart Snacks standards unless an exemption is requested.

- Ensuring all foods and beverages served and sold to students during the school day and during fundraisers meet ARS 15-242.01 standards. Fundraiser foods can NOT be exempted from ARS 15-242.01
- Engaging families and the community in school wellness efforts

PROCEDURES

Wellness Committee Operations

- AZACS shall establish a Local Wellness Committee that includes administrators, teachers, school health professionals, parents/guardians, community members, and students when appropriate.
- The Wellness Committee shall meet at least annually.
- The committee shall review progress on implementation and recommend updates as needed.

Nutrition Education

- Nutrition education shall be developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and integrated into the curriculum when feasible.
- Instruction shall include strategies appropriate for students with autism, such as visual supports and structured routines.

Physical Activity

- Schools shall provide opportunities for physical activity during the school day.
- Physical activities shall be adapted to support inclusion and accessibility.
- Physical activity shall not be withheld as a form of discipline.

School Meals

- AZACS shall participate in USDA child nutrition programs at Sponsored Sites, including the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), as applicable.
- Meals shall meet or exceed current nutrition requirements established by local, state, and federal statutes and regulations. (attachment #3)
- Meals shall be accessible to all students at sponsored sites, appealing and attractive to children, and served in clean, pleasant settings.
- Meals shall include a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, full-fat, fat-free, or low-fat milk, consistent with USDA requirements.
- Meals shall be moderate in sodium, low in saturated fat, and contain zero grams of trans fat per serving (per nutrition label or manufacturer specification).
- AZACS shall ensure free drinking water is available to students during meal service.

- AZACS shall promote participation in federal child nutrition programs among students and families.
- AZACS shall serve lunch at a reasonable time and allow a reasonable time for students to eat.
- AZACS shall accommodate documented dietary needs, allergies, and disability-related meal modifications.

Smarter Lunchroom Practices:

AZACS will promote healthy food and beverage choices using Smarter Lunchroom techniques, which may include:

- Displaying fruit options in the line of sight and reach of students
- Offering vegetables on all service lines
- Keeping milk cases and coolers stocked throughout meal service, offering white milk at all times.
- Providing a monthly meal menu to students, families, teachers, and administrators, and posting menus on the school website
- Creating a welcoming cafeteria environment by implementing creative marketing ideas and promotional strategies to encourage consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and healthy proteins. Techniques may include seasonal signage and themed bulletin boards and promotions, visually appealing cafeteria displays, and interactive student engagement activities such as taste-testing events designed to promote and encourage healthy food choices among students.

Competitive Foods and Beverages

- All foods and beverages **sold** to students on the school campus during the school day, outside reimbursable meals, shall meet or exceed USDA Smart Snacks in School standards (7 CFR 210.11) and ARS 15-242.01 standards.
- Smart Snacks and ARS 15-242.01 standards apply in all locations and through all services where foods and beverages are **sold**, including but not limited to:
 - À la carte options in cafeterias
 - Vending machines
 - School stores
 - Snack or food carts

Celebrations, Classroom Snacks, and Rewards

- AZACS shall encourage foods and beverages that meet nutrition standards for classroom celebrations, parties, and classroom snacks brought by parents.
- AZACS shall provide families and staff with resources suggesting healthy alternatives, including non-food celebration ideas.

- Food and beverages served in these instances are encouraged (but not required) to meet Smart Snacks standards (attachment #1) unless otherwise required by law or program rules.
- A.R.S. 15-242.01 (attachment #2) prohibits the service or sale of ultra-processed foods at any point of the school day. This includes student celebrations, birthday parties, prizes/incentives, and classroom snacks. A.R.S. 15- 242.01 does not prevent a student's parent or guardian from providing ultra-processed food to the student during the regular school day.

Fundraising

- All competitive food sold to students on the school campus during the school day must comply with Smart Snacks standards (unless an exception is requested) and A.R.S 15-242.01 (no exceptions permitted) for food **sold** to students. Food-related fundraisers must be infrequent, of duration not exceeding one week, and not be in competition with school meals in the food service area during meal service.
- All fundraising activities that take place **outside of school** are exempt from Smart Snacks/A.R.S 15-242.01 standards, as long as foods are not intended to be eaten on campus during school hours
- AZACS will encourage non-food fundraisers and those that promote physical activity (e.g., walkathons, fun runs, Jump Rope for Heart).

Marketing

- Food and beverage marketing refers to advertising and other promotions in schools.
- AZACS will permit marketing and advertising only for foods and beverages that meet or exceed Smart Snacks/ A.R.S 15-242.01 standards.
- As contracts are renewed and equipment is replaced, purchasing decisions should reflect the marketing guidelines in this policy.
- Immediate replacement of existing equipment is not required; however, AZACS will replace or update equipment over time as feasible.
- Healthy food and beverage choices shall be promoted throughout the school environment.

Monitoring and Assessment

- The Policy Owner or designee shall monitor compliance with this policy.
- A formal assessment of the Local Wellness Policy shall be conducted at least once every three years.
- The assessment shall evaluate compliance, monitor progress toward goals, and compare the policy to a model wellness policy.
- Assessment results shall be made available to the public in accordance with federal requirements.

Public Involvement

- AZACS will notify the public about the content of the Local Wellness Policy and updates to it at least annually.
- AZACS will communicate opportunities for participation in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the policy.
- Communication methods may include the school website, email, newsletters, parent presentations, and other culturally and linguistically appropriate mechanisms.

RESPONSIBILITIES

School Administration

- Ensure policy implementation and compliance.
- Appoint a Wellness Committee and Policy designee.

Wellness Committee

- Review and evaluate policy effectiveness
- Recommend revisions and indicate emerging needs

Nutrition Services

- Ensure meals and competitive foods meet USDA requirements
- Maintain documentation for administrative reviews

School Staff

- Support wellness practices and model healthy behaviors

ENFORCEMENT

Compliance

Failure to adhere to this policy may result in corrective action consistent with school procedures and applicable state and federal regulations. Noncompliance related to federal meal programs may result in required corrective action plans or fiscal penalties.

RELATED INFORMATION / FORMS

Cross-Referenced Policies

- Food Services / Nutrition Services Policies
- Special Education Policies (dietary accommodations, related services)
- Facilities and Safety Policies (water access, meal spaces)
- Student Health Services Policies

Regulatory References

- Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010
- USDA Local School Wellness Policy Final Rule (7 CFR 210.30)
- USDA Smart Snacks in School Standards
- The Arizona Healthy Schools Act (A.R.S 15-242.01)
- Arizona Department of Education (ADE) School Nutrition Programs

Attachments:

1. Smart Snacks
2. A.R.S 15-242.01
3. NSLP Breakfast and Lunch Meal Standards